“It Sucks for Me, and It Sucks for Them”: The Emotional Labor of Women Twitch Streamers

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ABSTRACT
Increasing and sustaining women’s participation in gaming spheres is a persistent problem DiGRA audiences are familiar with. This paper looks at the barriers to increasing and sustaining women’s participation on Twitch through examining the experiences of women streamers. Emotional labor (Hochschild 1983) is used as a framework for interpreting how these women’s individual experiences resonate within larger societal contexts of work and play more broadly. The paper relies on data from 8 in-depth interviews with international, English-speaking women who receive a primary or secondary income source from Twitch streaming videogames. The results of this study show that participants performed emotional labor, on top of the mental and physical labor of playing videogames on a live stream, and this emotional labor has potential negative implications for the longevity of their streaming careers.

Keywords
Twitch, women in games, stream culture, emotional labor

INTRODUCTION
Twitch.tv has continually grown in numbers of viewers and streamers since its launch in 2011. Streamlabs analyst Ethan May (2021) reports that Twitch is the most watched streaming platform in the world with 6.3 billion hours watched and 265 million hours streamed in just the first quarter of 2021. Viewership has globally grown by an estimated 10% during the first quarter of the corona virus pandemic (Stephen 2020). While the bulk of channels on Twitch.tv feature gaming content (Jia, Shen, Epema & Iosup 2016), it is worth mentioning that it is possible to find streams ranging in content from oil painting, to cooking, to even lawn mowing (Brown and Moberly 2021). As the platform has grown, the content being streamed has diversified even as Twitch struggles to diversify who can successfully stream on the platform.

In April 2021, as Twitch was breaking records for the number of viewers and streamers, only 8 of the top 200 streamers identified as women (Kharif 2021). This low number is more than double the previous year’s 3 (Kharif 2021). The scarcity of women top streamers shouldn’t be suggestive that women don’t stream, rather that to become a successful streamer (in terms of number of viewers) is much more difficult for women than it is for men. This is particularly troubling because there is a popular perception, at least in the author’s own lived experience, that women have an unfair advantage on the platform. Relying on old stereotypes which define gaming culture as predominately young and male (Kowert et al 2014), there is an assumption that women- particularly attractive ones- have an unfair advantage over male streamers in attracting viewers,

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subscribers, and followers. This, as we have seen in the data provided by Streamlabs in the Kharif 2021 article, is false.

The reasons why it is more difficult for women to gain success at streaming than men is a key question for not only streamers and stream-viewers, but also for the videogame community. This paper is situated within continuing academic and popular discourses which seek to increase diverse participation in gaming and esports. Women streamers are achieving success and visibility, just in significantly fewer numbers than their male counterparts. To explore why this is, this paper presents data from 8 in-depth, semi-structured interviews from international, English-speaking women Twitch videogame streamers. The interviews focused on women's general experiences with Twitch streaming, but the data presented in this paper predominantly comes from a question which asked how women give and receive support to and from other women in the streaming community. All interviews were conducted in June and July of 2020, and data analyzed through September-May 2020/2021. The results of this study show that participants performed emotional labor, on top of the mental and physical labor of playing videogames on a live stream, and this emotional labor has potential negative implications for the longevity of their streaming career.

This paper begins with a review of literature centered on what is currently known about women who Twitch stream and the systems in place which exclude their participation-namely the emotional labor they feel they must perform to exist on the platform. Emotional labor is a sociological theory developed by Arlie Hochschild in 1983 to acknowledge the emotional burden that women are often expected to perform in the workplace. After a review of literature has been presented, this paper will then describe the methods used to collect and analyze the data. With regards to the underpinning theories and methodologies, this paper represents interdisciplinary research which uses sociological theoretical frameworks combined with game studies to report on the issues behind a cultural phenomenon. Following that, an analysis section will discuss and describe the experiences of the women who participated in this research study. The conclusion will discuss the need for future follow up studies looking at how other marginalized groups experience the labor of Twitch streaming.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper considers the job of Twitch streaming to include all the physical and mental burdens we generally associate with streaming, but with the additional burden of emotional labor (Hochschild 1983). Emotional labor, which will be broken down in more depth later in this section, references the effort required to manage, express and induce in others a specific set of emotions. Before we can begin to discuss the labor undertaken specifically by women Twitch streamers, we first need to establish the conditions in which women stream. Acknowledging past research which establishes the difficulty women streamers encounter with gatekeeping, harassment, and policing of their bodies provides an important framework for contextualizing the emotional labor women feel they must produce in order to be successful on the platform. This review of literature establishes background information on two topics necessary to understanding the data presented. The first topic concerns a growing body of knowledge on women's participation on Twitch, the second concerns emotional labor.

To begin, Twitch as a streaming platform has a troubled history with including diverse creators. Although the focus of this article is on the experience of women creators, it is important to first acknowledge that creators of color and LGBTQIA+ streamers also experience harassment on the platform (Taylor 2018). As streaming culture fits under the larger umbrella of gaming culture, it should come as no surprise that the same 'technomasculine culture' of gaming is also prevalent in streaming. 'Technomasculine culture' (Apperley and Gray 2021) describes gaming culture as one which privileges

able-bodied, white, cis-het maleness at the expense of all other members of a group. As this literature review will illustrate, male Twitch streamers have the dual privileges of not having their credibility or professionalism questioned and their bodies are mostly free from community standards policing (Nakandala, Ciampaglia, Su, and Ahn 2016; Ruberg et al 2019; Dargonaki 2018; Taylor 2018; Zolides 2020). Of course, this isn't to say that men never experience harassment on the platform or struggle to achieve success, rather that previous studies have shown women streamers experience sexism consistent with technomasculine gaming culture when streaming on Twitch (Apperley and Gray 2021; Taylor 2018; Zolides 2020).

For competitive esports players streaming, one study showed that a player's gender is tied to the frequency of sexualized comments about their appearance, with women receiving more messages focused on their body than their male counterparts (Nakandala, Ciampaglia, Su, and Ahn 2016). A related study found that women esports athletes were less likely to receive praise from men than their male players (Ruvalcaba et al 2018). The same study showed that women were more likely than men to report receiving praise from women (Ruvalcaba et al 2018). Further, much like their overly sexualized in-game counterparts (Tompkins et al 2020), women who stream videogame content online often feel pressured to adhere to beauty and body standards which overly sexualize female bodies for the, presumably, heterosexual male gaze. Uszkoriet (2018) notes that there is pressure on women streamers to show skin, often in the form of cleavage-revealing beach attire, as a strategy to attract viewers to their channel. The attraction of viewers to a channel, regardless of method, is important for the long-term economic viability of a streamer's career as viewers contribute to advertising revenue as well as monetary tips, monthly paid subscriptions, and donations. Twitch and streaming platforms utilize streamer's immaterial labor and function under an attention economy (c.f. Senft 2013). The idea of an attention economy does not simply reference the accumulation of capital because of attention paid- if this were the case we'd expect to see more women in the top 200 streamers list. Rather the idea of an attention economy fleshes out the idea that an individual turns themselves, their life, their personality and their individuality into a corporation for the purposes of making money (Goldhaber 1997). The literature reviewed here points to two issues which stem from this strategy: attractive women are generally perceived as less competent (Heflick and Goldenberg 2009; Ruberg et al 2019; Dargonaki 2018), and women streamers wearing any clothing deemed revealing constantly have their bodies policed due to Twitch's community standards (Taylor 2018; Zolides 2020).

To break these two problems down further, previous studies have shown that women who are considered beautiful struggle to be taken seriously. In general contexts, a psychological study of people's perceptions of Sarah Palin in the 2008 USA vice presidential election found that her objectification as a beautiful woman reduced the public's belief in her competency for the elected position (Heflick and Goldberg 2009). In terms of streaming, studies have found as professional women streamers struggle to be taken seriously, their bodies are routinely used against them to undermine their skill and expertise (Dargonaki 2018). One common way to dismiss a woman's skill at videogame streaming is to refer to her as a 'titty streamer'. As a term, 'titty streamer' "…is a derogatory label applied to women streamers by detractors who perceive them as drawing undeserved attention and donations from viewers by presenting their bodies in sexualized ways (Ruberg et al 2019, p. 1)." So as women streamers feel pressure to show skin and adhere to larger societies' rigid beauty standards (Uszkoriet 2018), they are simultaneously shamed and degraded for it.

This shame and degradation take a formal form in Twitch's community guidelines. On the surface, community guidelines are a good idea in a world where anyone with a web camera and an internet connection can stream any content to any audience. However,

the ways in which Twitch's community guidelines are written and enforced have, in effect, created "…privileged systems for the cultural expressions and economic success in the form of monetary benefits… (Zolides 2020, p.2)" for some, but not all participants. Women streamers face formal punishment and deplatforming if they are found to be wearing clothing which does not meet nebulous and ill-defined community standards (Taylor 2018). Deplatforming, or when a streamer loses access to their channel and ability to stream as a punishment for violating community standards, has a palpable impact on the economic viability of streaming as a career. Although a streamer can create another account, losing access to their channel means losing access to their community, followers, and subscription and advertising revenue. Worse yet, policing of community standards has been crowd sourced by Twitch, meaning anyone with a Twitch account can report a streamer at any time for any reason. This has unfortunately led to roving bands of men who check women streamers for dress code violations (Zolides 2020). Twitch is already a hostile environment for women because of technomasculine gaming culture (Apperley and Gray 2021), the constant policing of their bodies (Ruberg et al 2019; Taylor 2018; Zolides 2020), but added to this hostility and bodily demands is an increased pressure to perform traditionally feminine gender roles (Dargonaki 2018).

Emotional labor, a term coined by Arlie Hochschild in 1983, introduces the idea of emotion management as an additional form of gendered labor. Gendered labor considers roles like care-giving, child-rearing, and housekeeping as traditionally classified as 'women's work', which is also traditionally unpaid (Friedemann-Sánchez and Griffin 2011). Work traditionally classified as feminine, for example nursing, has an additional component of emotional labor in the form of caregiving in addition to the mental and physical labor of the job (Henderson 2001). Women in the workplace have larger societal expectations that their work is less valuable than their male counterparts, and that their emotional nature lends well to unpaid caregiving roles (Cohen and Huffman 2003). The idea of emotional labor emerges from a background of understanding women as 'naturally' suited to caregiving jobs which likely do not adequately compensate them for their labor.

In defining emotional labor, Hochschild writes, "This labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others- in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labor calls for coordination of mind and feeling and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality (Hochschild 1983, p.21)." Emotional labor is different to physical or mental labor as it requires the policing of an individual's emotions to deliver an experience, or induce emotions, in an audience.

In the case of streaming, we might consider sitting in a chair for hours on end gaming to be physical and mental labor, while controlling countenance, language, and mood to be emotional labor. The controlling of countenance, language and mood have indeed already been labeled as emotional labor in streaming by previous research. Woodcock and Johnson (2019) used emotional labor to investigate how streamers perform a character and act out a role when live streaming. The Woodcock and Johnson (2019) study used semi-structured interviews with 100 streamers, about a third of those streamers women, and found that participants used the idea of acting or of playing a character on stream as a viable way to engage, entertain, and retain viewers. This paper builds on this study, albeit with a much more modest sampling size, by looking at the experiences of women streamers in particular.

For women streamers, as the analysis section will illustrate, emotional labor takes the form of not only controlling and presenting a specific set of emotions to a live stream

audience as seems true of all streamers (Woodcock and Johnson 2019), but also to other streamers, disruptive trolls, and community members who over step boundaries. It is therefore important that we think about emotional labor within the context presented within this literature review. This paper is situated not only within the technomasculine culture of Twitch (Apperley and Gray 2021) but also within a larger society and culture which devalues women's labor (Friedemann-Sánchez and Griffin 2011; Cohen and Huffman 2003). As this review of literature has shown, women streamers are entering a space which actively seeks to gatekeep them out, does not take their skill seriously, polices their bodies, and often directly harasses and threatens their very existence on the platform. And they are expected to do it with a full face of makeup and a smile on their face.

The rest of this paper will frame the experiences of the women who participated in this study within the framework of emotional labor to account for the additional burdens and work women Twitch streamers must complete in order to remain on the platform. Before the analysis can begin, however, a discussion of how the data which informs this paper was collected must first be established. The following section discusses the underpinning methodology and analysis which went into this paper.

METHODS

The data for this study was collected over the course of June and July 2020. A total of 8 interviews were conducted with international, English speaking women Twitch streamers who earn part-time or full-time revenue from their streams. Of the 8 participants, 2 identified as straight or heterosexual, 2 as bisexual, and 4 did not disclose sexual identity or preference. Participants self-identified their gender identity and transwomen were included in participation.

The women were recruited from the researcher's own existing social networks as a streamer herself and through snowball sampling. Although knowing the participants beforehand arguably introduces bias which could impact the analysis of the data, this paper embraces an ontological and epistemological approach which values the experiences of the participants as data, and the active role of the researcher in interpreting that data (Charmaz 2004; Hine 2000). As this paper does not attempt to generate generalizable data, but rather to share in-depth accounts of the experiences of a handful of women streamers, the author's existing familiarity with participants and their Twitch streams is a boon to accurately contextualizing the data. Through knowing and having experience with streaming herself, the author is better able to provide an insightful and deep analysis of the lived experiences of these women.

In-depth interviews were selected as a methodology in order to adhere to the research's ontology and epistemology. The ontological perspective of this research "sees interactions, actions, and behaviors and the way people interpret these, act on them, and so on, as central" (Mason 2002, p.85). This paper therefore considers the experiences of women Twitch streamers as data. More than just objective experiences, this paper is concerned with the ways in which women Twitch streamers interpret their experiences, discuss the experiences with others, and make future behavioral choices- like the choice to continue streaming- based upon these experiences. Additionally, this study recognizes the limitations of social science research methods to fully and completely understand and document a phenomenon as personal as Twitch streaming. This study thus chooses to embrace a postmodern epistemology which understands the traditional boundaries between the interviewer and interviewee have become blurred, and that there is more at stake for these interviews than simply data collection (Borer and Fontana 2012). When studying marginalized groups, the epistemological question of who's story is being told and why it is being told is an important one. In order to see these women's experiences as they saw them, in-depth interviews were chosen as a

method. In-depth interviews support the ontological and epistemological grounding of this research by allowing their experiences to be expressed contextually and authentically in their own words. A limitation of this method is that the results and findings here cannot be generalized to any larger population. Although the stories and experiences of participants presented in this paper may overlap with those reading it, the selected methodology allows for depth rather than breadth and takeaways from the paper should be contextualized as such.

The overall topic of the in-depth interviews was centered on how women support other women streamers. Although the interview guide did not contain questions about sensitive topics like harassment and bullying, given the nature of streaming it was assumed that these topics could come up. To ensure every effort to reduce the likelihood of harm to participants was made, ethics review board approval was sought (and granted) from a university ethics review board and an informed consent process was implemented.

After expressing initial interest in the project, two participants declined participation. Both declined after reading the informed consent due to discomfort that their voice (but not video) would be recorded during the interview. The interviews were conducted anonymously, but for the two potential participants who declined there was a fear that some detail (either through the interview data or through someone recognizing their voice on the recording in the event of a data breach) would put their anonymity in jeopardy. It is important to mention this fear of loss of anonymity and how it impacted study recruitment not only for methodological reasons of justifying snowball sampling, but also to illustrate how real the fear of loss of anonymity is for women talking about Twitch.

Interviews took place via Discord voice chat and were recorded to password protected hard drives using Open Broadcasting Software (OBS), a popular software used by streamers to broadcast to Twitch. Within 2 weeks of recording, all interviews were transcribed by the researcher herself and the recording files were deleted. Participants were assigned a random number to identify their interview and subsequent transcript in the event that they wished to terminate participation after the interviews were conducted. The informed consent "document" was verbally agreed to by participants who also received a written copy through Discord no sooner than 24 hours before the interview took place. No signatures, legal names, Twitch names, Discord names, or any other identifiable information was collected and any identifiable information which came up in the recordings were changed. So, for example, if a participant discussed streaming a specific game title such as *The Legend of Zelda*, the game name was replaced in the transcription with an anonymous genre identifier like "action adventure RPG". Stream communities are small and it is common for streamers of a particular game to know other streamers of the same game very well, and so every effort was made to keep participant identity a mystery.

After the interviews were transcribed, a thematic analysis was conducted on the resulting data and a total of 4 themes emerged- performance, community, flirtation, support. The data presented here emerges only from the 'support' theme. Thematic analysis is a way to identify and organize persistent themes which emerge from a data set (Nowell et al 2017). Predominantly, responses came from a survey question asking "During your time streaming, have you received/provided mentorship or support from any women in the streaming community?" The central theme emerging from this analysis show that participants performed emotional labor, on top of the mental and physical labor of playing videogames on a live stream, and this emotional labor has potential negative implications for the longevity of their streaming career.

ANALYSIS

In order to establish that the women in this study performed emotional labor on top of mental and physical labor, a break down of each of these types of labor is needed. The physical labor of Twitch streaming involves the same physical actions undertaken in playing a videogame- clicking a mouse and keyboard, and/or pressing buttons on a controller, and sitting in a chair for hours on end. Additionally, there is physical labor in setting up the components of a stream which includes installing a green screen, setting up a web camera and microphone, and adjusting lighting. The mental labor involved in streaming includes all the focus and attention required to play a videogame plus knowledge of managing streaming software.

Emotional labor is also present in most Twitch streams. Community management specifically and interacting with people generally requires individuals suppress or inflate their emotions and read the emotions of other people in order to have successful communication. In terms of Twitch streaming, emotional labor is required to successfully engage with viewers when live, and often additional emotional labor is required when offline to keep up working relationships with other streamers and to engage with community members on platforms outside of Twitch- for example on social media.

The interview data presented here illustrates how the women Twitch streamers in this study complete emotional labor (Hochschild 1983) and the implications this labor might have for their career longevity as a streamer. In the first portion of the following excerpt, Participant 1 describes how receiving disturbing and harassing messages on Twitch made her want to stop streaming. She says:

> *Right, so honestly, I feel like it is more emotional support than anything. When someone comes in and harasses [me] its like, I'm just banning them. But I used to get really, really uncomfortable, understandably, when I was younger. Like, "Oh my god I can't believe someone is saying these things to me." It made me not want to do anything. Like, it made me not really want to stream. It made me uncomfortable… But after hearing these bigger streamers talk more about how they got through that- it isn't even necessarily just how to deal with it, um, I'd say it is more just the emotional support of like, "Yeah, this happens all the time". I've seen how they [Famous Streamers] deal with things and it is usually the same way. I've seen bigger streamers get harassed and it is very satisfying to see the other person get caught doing something or get into trouble. [Laughs.] But that's not necessarily a viable thing that I could do usually. Usually it is just like, banning them. That's really your only option, so….*

Participant 1 establishes that early in her career harassing messages made her want to quit streaming, but instead of quitting she found support by watching other women go through the same thing. She describes a feeling of solidarity in watching bigger streamers- those with more views and more followers- being subjected to and effectively countering harassment. What Participant 1 describes, this, "we're all in the same boat" way of looking at the harassment problem is interesting because she notes that the counter-harassment strategies employed by more famous streamers- calling out the trolls and publicly shaming them- are not open to her as a smaller streamer. The only option afforded to her and her stream is to block the detractor. However, in witnessing the emotional labor of bigger streamers who counter trolls head-on, Participant 1 finds the motivation to keep streaming.

Participant 1 goes on to describe how now she has moderators, called 'mods' in abbreviation, who delete harassing comments before she can read them. In the event that her mods cannot delete a comment before she can see it, or in the event that the

comment is particularly nasty or upsetting, she describes the emotional labor she must perform to reassure her community that everything is okay.

> *Participant 1: But that is super important and that has helped me so much when they just delete comments before I can even see them. I won't even know what has happened. I will just look over and see messages deleted and be like, okay and I will move on with my life. Sometimes if it is a really bad insult, I will acknowledge it. I feel like I have to acknowledge it for my community. I sense that maybe bigger streamers feel the same way.*
>
> *Interviewer: Why do you feel like you have to acknowledge it for your community?*
>
> *Participant 1: Um, because sometimes it catches them off guard and it makes them feel uncomfortable. Like, "Someone just said this awful thing," and sometimes I don't see it unfortunately so I don't know. And I don't want to look if it is really bad, so… I feel like I have to acknowledge it sometimes to put my community more at ease. Like, yeah, trolls suck. We just deal with it. I don't really know what else to say.*
>
> *Interviewer: It is really interesting that you feel like you need to protect your community and not yourself in those situations.*
>
> *Participant 1: Yeah, I mean, I feel like I do protect myself because I ban them, I just don't know what else I can say, I guess. 'Cause usually I feel fine so I don't feel that need to… I don't know. Usually, I… I don't know. I'll acknowledge it to the person who is saying something fucked up and say how I feel but then I transition over to my community because it sucks for them. It sucks for me, but it also sucks for them because they have to be a part of that uncomfortableness. And they are very supportive of me but yeah, this wasn't intended so it feels like I have to acknowledge it.*

Participant 1's experience of addressing harassment, and managing her response to it even when it is deeply unpleasant, meets the definition of emotional labor. To briefly revisit the definition, emotional labor has been previously defined as labor which, "…requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others… (Hochschild 1983, p.21)." In this example, Participant 1 is doing emotional labor firstly by acknowledging bad insults on behalf of her community when she would otherwise be content to 'move on with [her] life,' and secondly because she feels that her community is experiencing an unwanted emotion, 'uncomfortableness', and she wants them to feel comfortable. By addressing the insult, Participant 1 performs the emotional labor necessary to invoke feelings of comfort in her viewers after an upsetting event has occurred. As a reminder, this is emotional labor she does on top of the regularly required mental and physical labor of streaming a videogame.

There is even a component of emotional labor which accompanies the mental and physical labor of streaming. Participant 3 describes the emotional labor involved in just setting up a stream as having good days and bad days. When streaming, women often discussed needing to look healthy and well rested, usually achieved by applying makeup, and by putting on a friendly face, usually achieved by smiling during the whole stream. Whether or not the women actually feel happy is irrelevant to their portrayal of happiness. Participant 3 elaborates on this below:

> *I mean, honestly, I feel like there are days where you get on and you're expecting something or you are in a great mood and maybe the numbers aren't where they usually are… And the whole numbers thing is something I didn't realize I would care about when I started streaming. But, you know, it is the feeling of, "Oh my goodness, my numbers are really down today. I feel like there wasn't as many people there, no one was really talking…" And that can really bring down my mood. And I feel like that's so selfish and [laughs] it seems so silly to care about a number so much...*

In the interview excerpt above, Participant 3 talks about how having fewer viewers from one day to the next can cause her to feel down. Feeling low because of a drop in participation, and potentially income, is understandable for a performer, but Participant 3 describes her low feelings as 'selfish' and 'silly'. Participant 3's experience fits well within emotional labor, but also within the adjacent theory of 'aspirational labor (Duffy 2017).' Aspirational labor is the idea espoused by female content creators that their unpaid work will eventually payoff in the form of sustainable financial compensation if only they try hard enough, are dedicated and persistent (Duffy 2017). Of course, as this paper started off, only 8 of the top 200 streamers on Twitch are women. As Duffy writes, "Aspirational labor, as a critical concept, also calls attention to the gap between this belief [that success is achievable if you work hard enough] and the practical realities of the digital labor marketplace: just a few digital content creators reap significant material rewards from their activities" (2017, p.15). Having a bad revenue day is something which could cause low feelings for any entrepreneur. Participant 3's invalidation of her own feelings, however, is what is interesting here. Reading her own experiences as 'silly' or 'selfish' is both emotional and aspirational labor as it manages and suppresses true feelings of disappointment in order to put on a happy face for the stream and keep trying for success.

Somewhere between Participant 1's harassment and Participant 3's description of routine emotional labor for streaming is Participant 2's description of how she deals with routine harassment. Actually, every one of the 8 participants expressed experiencing harassment or unwanted attention to some effect, and they reported relying on other women streamers to support them through the difficulties of those experiences. Much like how Ruvalcaba et al's (2018) study found that women were more likely to receive support from other women, the women in this study similarly reported seeking out the support of women in times of need. When asked why she seeks out other women streamers for support in times of difficulty, Participant 2 says:

> *Because it isn't easy being a female in this kind of community. It really is not. And I mean you see all this stuff going on on Twitter with all these people coming out about sexual harassment and sexual assault and those kind of things. A lot of women who have been screwed over because of this male dominated platform.*

Much like how Participant 1 connected her experiences to other famous Twitch streamers as a way to feel less isolated in her negative experiences, Participant 2 connects her own experiences with larger contemporary narratives concerning sexual harassment and assault in Twitch and in games more broadly. The women in this study were well aware that their experiences were not uncommon or unusual within streaming or games at large, however they were very aware that the forms of support for dealing with these experiences usually fall to other women. In a misogynistic culture which actively seeks to prevent the equal participation of women, women seek out each other, and not the (predominately) men responsible for the platform at Twitch corporate. Reaching out to other women for support is not necessarily a bad thing, but it becomes

a bad thing when those who profit most off these women's labor are not held accountable for their safety.

So far, this paper has established that emotional labor is required to stream on Twitch and to cope with the subsequent harassment, and getting harassed on Twitch was an experience shared by every participant in this study. Adding to this is the emotional labor participants reported doing to manage their communities. Even community members who actively watch their channels, help grow their communities, and provide financial support require emotional labor to manage and maintain. Participant 7 talks about how a member of her community will approach her on social media and on Twitch to provide unsolicited advice about her stream.

> *Well, yeah but he will do it on Instagram. So he will come into Twitch and like say hello basically and leave and then come into my Instagram and be like, "You need to change your camera angle." I'm like… "Fuck you." [laughs] I'm like, "Get outta here boy!" But, you know, he is also the guy who donated my capture card. He has donated a ton of gear to me so I can't, I don't want to be rude, but I also said, "You know, sometimes you just tell me what I am doing wrong and it feels bad because I feel like I am doing some stuff right and you don't acknowledge it." And he's like, "No, no, no, I didn't mean it that way." I'll kind of call it out…*

In Participant 7's experience, one of her community members who helps financially support her approaches her outside of her stream to provide unsolicited advice which could be classified as 'mansplaining'. Mansplaining, or when men explain things to women which women already know, is at best annoying and at worst an insult to a woman's agency and intelligence (Dular 2021). In Participant 7's case, she must perform the emotional labor of suppressing her own reactions- in her not wishing to be rude to her community member- and in managing his emotions. While she'd rather react by telling him, "fuck you," she doesn't because she doesn't want to upset someone who has been financially supportive of her stream.

Participant 8 reported similarly struggling with the emotional labor of dealing with community members. She talks about her experience in terms of boundary setting, but also in delicately balancing financial dependence on community members with her own level of comfort. In discussing drawing the line, or put differently, setting boundaries, she says:

> *In the early days it was very hard to work out where that line was. Especially in the early days. I wanted to full-time stream and it felt like the overwhelming feeling was the main people that would financially support you would want something weird in return. Not necessarily so overtly. They wouldn't necessarily message you and say, "I sent you 50 [Great British] pounds, you need to send me a sexy picture." It wasn't like that, but they would send you messages after stream with kisses on and "Hey babe, how are you?" They would want that one-on-one time which it was like, no. You're tipping because you are enjoying the content, you're not paying to have one on one time with me. In the early stages, it felt like I had to pander to that lot. I tried to make it clear to them that I was just a friend, I was a this or that, but I would still respond every now and again because it felt like that was just the tradeoff. As things progressed and I became more established in my career, I find it much easier to just go, "No, don't talk to me again. My DMs are open for emergencies and professional situations. Everything else, put it in the main Discord."*

In addition to discussing the boundaries she must set to protect herself and her time, Participant 8 also discusses feeling compelled to play therapist to her community members[1]. Although some community members may approach the streamers of this study for attention or therapy because of a parasocial relationship, the focus of the study is not on why the community member approaches a streamer, but rather on how the streamer experiences that approach. Parasocial relationships are described by Kowert (2021) as one-sided social relationships wherein the viewer feels close to a content provider who may or may not know that the viewer exists. The quote which follows below at once describes the emotional labor of being sympathetic for the mental health struggles of community members, while also describing the delicate balance of relying on the same community members for financial support. It then becomes the labor of the streamer to set appropriate boundaries and redirect the community member to a licensed professional while not outright rejecting them as a paying customer.

> *You know, there's a lot of other, deeper issues that streamers have to deal with. You end up being a counselor and just so much more. You know, you have to run a business but at the same time it is very delicate. Instead of people going into a shop and purchasing an item, you know, there is a lot more that goes into it. For example, female streamers- and streamers in general I guess, can have people support them financially but then send them a message telling them that they- asking questions about their mental health and you know, just trying to get counselling out of you or therapy out of you. Or perhaps they want more. Maybe they want feet pictures, etc., etc. So you then have this very delicate, bizarre situation of trying to maintain financial support whilst needing to create boundaries. It is things like that that normal humans who have normal jobs working in offices probably have no idea how to deal with.*

Like Participant 7, Participant 8 discusses the delicate balance of needing to set boundaries while managing the emotions of her community member. Participant 8 contrasts her experiences to 'normal', or more traditional forms of labor like working in an office or running a shop. Her stream is a business, only the relationships she has with her 'customers' -to extend the metaphor- are far more than simply transactional. Instead of just selling items, she is also expected to deal with her community members' routine emotional needs in a way that would not be expected of a shop clerk. In this case, she is performing emotional labor to manage their emotions and suppress her own because if she tells them to leave, there is a worry she'll lose financial support.

This paper has shown that Twitch streamers are expected to perform emotional labor when harassed, as part of their routine streams, and in dealing with the members of their community who financially support them. In each of these situations, participants relied on other women for support and encouragement to cope with the difficulties they face as streamers. Participants did not place value in reaching out to Twitch for support as they were seen as either not caring about these women's experiences or attempts to reach out were seen as ineffective. I want to end this analysis section on a very important, but heartbreaking quote. For Participant 4, the support she found from women in the community was insufficient to keep her streaming.

> *I will share this, I did shut down my stream because of unwanted attention from people I did not ask attention of. It had very serious repercussions for me. At the end of the day, no matter how many women or family or friends supported me through that I still had to shut it [my Twitch channel] down. Like, it still ended that way and that sucks. That is what feels so defeating about support. We give it and we give it and we give it and yet it still ends in the same place. I've thought about that a lot as I have been returning to the streaming space. I am in conversations to restart. That is what leaves me super divided. At the end*

> *of the day, the power… You have to look at who are the gatekeepers of this space. And so the conversations can happen all day long. I believe them, I try to have them much more consciously now than I did when I started out, but who are the gatekeepers? And until you can determine who the gatekeepers are of those experiences and have those conversations with them and make them listen, I feel like change is very hard to garner.*

Participant 4's above quote provides a larger context for this paper and for the experiences of women in this study. The emotional labor performed by these women for the good of their communities and for the good in supporting diversity and inclusion of women on the platform is ultimately meaningless without support from Twitch corporate. The culture of gatekeeping on Twitch causes undue emotional labor for women streamers and thus far, there have been insufficient corporate attempts to change that culture. The emotional labor being performed by women Twitch streamers can be considered a short-term solution to keep women safe and able to support themselves through streaming, but not a long-term solution to widening participation on Twitch. This will be discussed in more depth below.

CONCLUSIONS

Through looking at the experiences of 8 women Twitch streamers, this paper has explored the emotional labor the participants feel is necessary to exist on the platform. In order to deal with harassment from viewers or community members which made Participant 1 feel "Like, it made me not really want to stream," emotional labor was performed to manage her reaction and the reactions of her community. In situations where the women streamers like Participant 1 felt threatened or, in the case of Participant 7, had their streaming abilities questioned, they had to suppress feelings of discomfort or inadequacy to continue streaming. In the 'technomasculine' culture (Apperley and Gray 2021) of Twitch, women streamers persistently have their bodies, actions, and even stream set ups policed by men. To cope with the gatekeeping, policing and harassment they experience, women must undertake emotional labor (Horchschild 1983) to suppress their emotions, as in the examples from Participant 1 and 7 above, and the emotions of their community members. Failure to suppress their emotions or placate the emotions of those who provide financial support puts the long-term fiscal viability of their stream at risk.

The data presented in this paper adds to larger discussions of how to recruit and retain women in predominately masculine fields like gaming. The reasons why more women don't appear in the top 200 streamer list remains complex (Kharif 2021), however this paper offers some insight into the potential hindrances to women's success on the platform. Although the harassment women experience on Twitch has been well documented (Nakandala, Ciampaglia, Su, and Ahn 2016; Ruberg et al 2019; Dargonaki 2018; Taylor 2018; Zolides 2020), this paper provides new insight into the labor women produce to counter that harassment. The women in this study discussed their strategies for suppressing their emotions, setting boundaries with difficult community members, and how they support one another and encourage each other's success. The participants' motivation to do the emotional labor of suppression, boundary setting, and support does not stem from monetary payment but rather a desire to continue streaming, and to see their fellow women continue streaming, on the platform.

As this paper draws to a close, it is important to consider again Participant 4's statement, "That is what feels so defeating about support. We give it and we give it and we give it and yet it still ends in the same place." The futility of support, in the experience of Participant 4, is that it requires the women experiencing trouble on the platform to do additional labor to keep themselves, their communities, and other women streamers safely participating. Ultimately this support, which comes from

already marginalized groups, is insufficient to keep some women, like Participant 4, streaming. Although the purview of this paper was limited to a small number of women streamers, the author hopes to see future papers discuss the experiences of other marginalized groups. The author also hopes to see a future in which women no longer need to perform emotional labor to counter gatekeeping and harassment in order to participate in streaming and gaming culture, and until that's the case, that women are adequately financially compensated for the additional work they must do to participate.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The streamer-turned-accidental-therapist experience is a common one. For more information, read the upcoming chapter: Dunlap, K., Shanlet, M. and Wagner, J. 2022. “Mental Health Live: An Ethnographic Study on the Mental Health of Twitch Streamers During COVID”. *Live Streaming Culture*. MIT Press.